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He spoke eloquently of change, and with his resounding victory—and historic election as the first African-American President of the United States—Barack Obama delivered it
BY SANDRA SOBIERAJ WESTFALL AND BILL HEWITT

Election Night

"It's been a long time coming, but tonight... change has come to America." Obama told the crowd of more than 200,000 who gathered at Grant Park in Chicago to celebrate.

PRESIDENT-ELECT
BARACK OBAMA

'ALL
THINGS
ARE
POSSIBLE'

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Barack Obama sat on a sofa beside his 71-year-old mother-in-law, Marian Robinson, in a small suite at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. It was a little before 10 p.m., and the family—just family—had broken away from the bigger returns-watching party downstairs. Campaign aides had already started to hear that news organizations were close to calling the election for Obama. His uncle Steve Robinson beat them to it. “He said, ‘I told you,’” Marian Robinson recalls the morning after. “We all had our little laugh when he said it. It was like, Okay, that means it’s true.” By the time CNN made it official, Robinson adds, “everybody was quiet. I can’t tell you how subdued it was. We weren’t like the people in the stands—you know, yelling and screaming.”

People had been anticipating the moment for weeks and months, if not generations. And yet when it came, there was still an instant of shock. The second that news organizations declared Barack Obama the next President of the United States, the crowd of more than 200,000 that had gathered in and around Chicago’s Grant Park erupted in shrieks and cries of “My God!” People trembled, wept, hugged each other. One twentysomething white man, with tears in his eyes, stood quietly holding a torn piece of canvas on which he had fashioned letters out of duct tape: We Have Overcome.

The election of a new President always marks the start of a fresh chapter in the nation’s history. But to many supporters, Nov. 4, 2008, felt like the beginning of a whole new volume: the election of the first African-American man as President, at last affirming the cherished belief that anyone could grow up to win the highest office. If nothing else, Obama, 47, just four

**VOTER
TURNOUT
135
MILLION**



*New Hampshire,
July 2007*

Obama is “so graceful, and he has a capacity which, even in the midst of this serious campaign, has yet to be completely tapped,” says his friend Marty Nesbitt.



The election was especially emotional for African-Americans, many of whom never thought a black person could reach the nation’s highest office.



Obama challenged his supporters to “join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it’s been done in America for 221 years: block by block, brick by brick.”

years into his first Senate term, has already redefined what is possible on the nation’s political landscape. But coming into office at a time of war and global financial crisis, the 44th President won’t have the luxury of savoring his historic achievement for long—a sobering truth he acknowledged in his victory speech, delivered with the protection of plates of 8-ft.-high bullet-proof glass. “For even as we celebrate tonight,” he said, “we know that the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime.”

But celebrate they did anyway,

fueled by the news that Obama had smashed the red-state/blue-state jigsaw puzzle by capturing such formerly Republican bastions as Virginia and Indiana. After the speech Barack and his wife, Michelle, 44, spent several hours with friends, staffers and supporters. “They’re big huggers, so there’s a lot of hugs, a lot of thank-yous, a lot of warmth,” said one campaign aide. In addition to the masses of ordinary people drawn to downtown Chicago on the unseasonably mild November night, political heavyweights and celebrities—from



“This won’t get him down, he is a very optimistic and energetic person,” says longtime friend Betsy Bayless.

“The end of a long journey”

After an exhausting day campaigning in Colorado and New Mexico, John McCain and his wife, Cindy, arrived to a celebration at the Biltmore Hotel in Phoenix. But the mood turned somber as word of Barack Obama’s win in Ohio spread through the crowd. McCain, a comeback kid who had survived 5 1/2 years as a POW in Vietnam, whose fight for the candidacy was almost dead a year ago, had finally

met his match. Trailing in the polls since late September, McCain kept up staffers’ spirits with Henry Youngman one-liners and exuberant declarations like the one he gave Tuesday morning in Colorado: “We never give up, we never quit. We never hide from history—we make history!” He was right on every count except for the last. And that was the one that hurt the most. —Bob Meadows, with Liz McNeil



In his victory speech Obama called Biden (with his wife, Jill, in August) "my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart."



Obama (in Seattle in February) crisscrossed the country for 21 months. "The duty that he has become clearer as he spent more and more time with ordinary Americans," says his old friend Julius Genachowski.



Obama (holding an impromptu press conference in February) is "Steady Eddie," says Nesbitt. "He's always tended to listen much more than he talks."

Growing Up in the White House

For the Obama girls, a new life full of perks—and pitfalls

They already take tennis and music lessons, so the all-weather court on the South Lawn and the grand piano in the second-floor Central Hall should come in handy for Malia and Sasha Obama as they settle into the White House. Other bonuses: a pastry shop, swimming pool, bowling alley, movie theater (with popcorn cart) and, in the private quarters on the third floor, a polished-wood ramp for sock-sliding contests. White House staffers will plan slumber parties or scavenger hunts—as they did for Amy Carter and Chelsea Clinton, the last young children to inhabit 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

But those who know the Obama children—Malia, 10 (Secret Service code name: "Radiance"), is the "logical" one, while Sasha, 7 ("Rosebud"), is the cutup, says family friend Marty Nesbitt—and those who know the White House worry that there are drawbacks for children growing up there. "It's been such a long time since there have been such little ones in the White House," says Carl Anthony, historian for the National First Ladies Museum. "My first impulse is to think, 'Gosh, I hope they're protected from becoming mini-celebrities.'"

That may not always be easy. The White House pastry chef will spin sugar into the girls' most beloved storybook characters, the florist will know their favorite flowers, and, says former Clinton White House Social Secretary Capricia Marshall, "when a day hasn't gone quite right, the butlers will make

Sasha and Malia

The well-being of Malia and Sasha (on the campaign bus last July 4) is Michelle's biggest priority. She told her mom, "Everything is okay as long as my children are okay."



sure you have your favorite dessert." The ushers will even make sure their dog to be gets walked (the Obamas promised their girls a dog—win or lose—and Malia has been Googling for breeds that won't aggravate her asthma). The first big decisions the family will face are schools—the girls attend a private school in Chicago—and how to make the White House home. The Obamas will be given considerable leeway by the White House Historical Association to redesign the private quarters on the second and third floors, but even for the First Daughters, there will be limits: Sasha could not, for example, put hammer to nail

to hang a Jonas Brothers poster in her room. "The ushers prefer Fun-tack," Marshall notes. And what about Mom's House Rules—that the girls set their own alarms, make their beds, clear the dinner table? Will Sasha and Malia still have to pick up their own toys? "Absolutely," says retired White House Chief Usher Gary J. Walters. "Her rules reign."



John F. Kennedy Jr., almost 3, in the Oval Office in 1963.



In 1995 the Clintons threw daughter Chelsea a 15th-birthday party in the White House kitchen.

ELECTION 2008 ★

Brad Pitt to Oprah Winfrey to party chairman Howard Dean—were also on hand to show their support. In the rest of the world, the anticipation was especially great in Kenya, where Obama's father, Barack Obama Sr., was born. (He died in a car crash in 1982.) In the capital, Nairobi, people thronged the streets chanting "Obama! Obama!" If he was overwhelmed by the moment, he didn't show it. To those who know him best, that wasn't surprising. Close family friend Marty Nesbitt says that the President-elect doesn't allow himself to get burdened unduly by the issues that he faces. "It doesn't weigh on him

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I WILL ALWAYS BE
HONEST WITH
YOU ABOUT THE
CHALLENGES WE
FACE” —BARACK OBAMA

like it would weigh on the average person," says Nesbitt. "He's Steady Eddie."

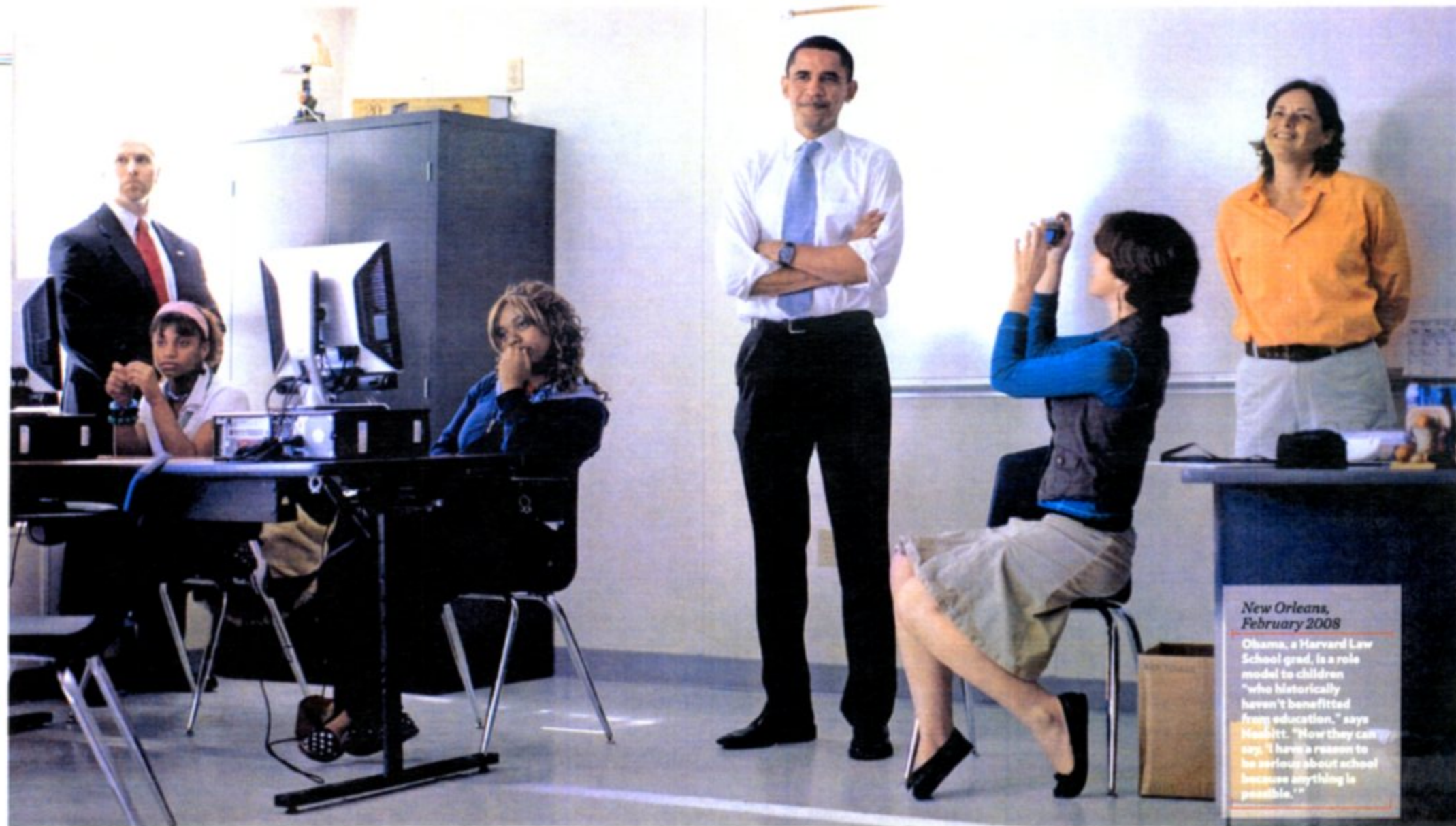
That much was evident throughout the course of an incredibly focused campaign against Sen. John McCain, all the way through to election day itself. On Nov. 4, always sticklers for discipline, the Obamas tried to keep to their routine. They voted just after 7:30 a.m. at their usual polling place, the Beulah Shoemith Elementary School on the South Side of Chicago, bringing along Sasha and Malia. (After Michelle took a long time to finish, her husband cracked, "I had to check out to see who she was voting for.")

The girls later went to school as usual on Tuesday, then got their hair done for the big night. By bedtime,

extended for the occasion, their grandmother Marian Robinson, who has taken care of Malia and Sasha while their parents traveled with the campaign, hoped they'd get another break from Mom's strict schedule. "I told the girls, 'Well, surely your mother's not going to make you go to school after being up this late at night; that would be cruel,'" Marian Robinson told PEOPLE with a hearty laugh. "So I told Malia, 'Just don't set your clock.'" Sure enough, though, they were headed to school Wednesday morning.

Meanwhile the candidate, after some last-minute campaigning, returned to Chicago for his own election day routine: a basketball game with some buddies and staffers. Then it was back home for a quiet steak dinner at his home in Hyde Park with his family.

Those rituals are of course going to be harder to come by in the months to come. In any event, Michelle, a hospital executive taking home a six-figure salary before the campaign began, gives every indication of being a more traditional First Lady than her



New Orleans, February 2008

Obama, a Harvard Law School grad, is a role model to children "who historically haven't benefitted from education," says Nesbitt. "Now they can say, 'I have a reason to be serious about school because anything is possible.'"

HIS BELOVED 'TOOT'

"I know my grandmother is watching, along with the family that made me who I am," Obama said in a bittersweet moment on Nov. 4. For just two days before, his grandmother Madelyn Dunham died of cancer at 86. Along with husband Stanley, "Toot," as Obama called her, raised young Barack for several years in Hawaii. "I'm not going to talk about it too long," he said, tearing up at a campaign stop, "because it's hard, a little, to talk about."



Obama with Stanley and Madelyn Dunham.

BY LARRY BUSCH FOR PEOPLE

St. Louis, October 2008

Huge crowds followed wherever Obama went. In St. Louis an estimated 100,000 people gathered to get a glimpse of the candidate.



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background might suggest. She has said her first priority will be to get her daughters settled in their new home, new school, new routines (see box). As she told *PEOPLE* at the beginning of the campaign, "Our concern is that they stay normal." She looks at her girls and worries that their childhood, as they have known it, is over. If Obama serves two terms, Malia will be headed to college straight from the White House. "I've done that math," Michelle told *PEOPLE* over the summer, nodding her head a little mournfully. "Where I gain comfort is that all of these

[presidential] children have turned out to be pretty decent kids, even with the bumps and bruises that go along."

Michelle has also said she will focus her energies on a cause closest to her heart: help for working parents to achieve "work-family balance," with a special emphasis on military families, whose juggling act is disrupted by a parent's deployment. As for a Hillary-style office in the West Wing and a seat at the policy table, the Harvard-trained lawyer says no thanks. "I can't do everything," says Michelle.

Even in retrospect, her husband's political ascent seems astonishing. The brown-skinned son of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Kenya, one who lived for a time in Indonesia (eating tiger meat!) and tried cocaine as a teen in Hawaii, he presented some stunningly original growth rings for presidential timber. Even his own mother-in-law doubted, at first, that the country was ready for a black President. In June 2007 Robinson told *PEOPLE*, "There are people right now, older black people, who don't think Barack can be elected President because of what they've known."

Out on the hustings, Obama himself rarely mentioned race. He would

Photograph by DAVID BURNETT

Chicago,
Nov. 4, 2008

Michelle, whom Obama called "my best friend for the last 16 years," shares an intimate moment with her husband on stage. "I'm so proud of her," her mother-in-law, Robinson, says. PEOPLE



merely invite supporters to help him "write the next great chapter in the American story." Nevertheless, the transformation in the nation's attitudes that he embodied was plain to many black Americans, such as Angela Cox, a 43-year-old Florida high school teacher who gripped a colleague's hand and wept as Obama took the stage at the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena on the eve of the election. "For the first time, I see my students really believing that skin color really doesn't matter," she said, shaking.

For all the historic significance of Obama's election—a history still to be written—his victory also reflects something much more basic and human. Robinson recalls holding her son-in-law's hand in the hotel suite on

election night. "I was thinking about what a journey you have to come," she says. "It was almost like there weren't any words." Seeing past skin color was a lesson Obama learned from his

white grandparents, who raised him in Hawaii while his mother pursued an advanced degree in anthropology. The death of his grandmother Madelyn Dunham deeply saddened him (see box). "He feels an obligation to fulfill his potential for his grandmother, who sacrificed so much for him," says Nesbitt. So it wasn't surprising that "sacrifice" was one of the watchwords of Obama's victory speech in Grant Park. "The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep," he said. "This victory alone is not the change we seek; it is only the chance for us to make that change." There was no denying the challenges. But in the immediate glow of his extraordinary triumph, there was also no denying that nothing seemed beyond reach. ●

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THEY'RE BIG
HUGGERS, SO
THERE'S A LOT OF
HUGS...A LOT OF
WARMTH” —A campaign aide

